

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Mariana Budge and I am a fourth year medical student at Yale School of Medicine in New Haven, CT. I am also the Executive Director of the HAVEN Free Clinic, a non-profit clinic that provides primary care services to uninsured individuals from the greater New Haven county free of charge.

I stand in support of SB284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare they need and deserve. But our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults.

As a future pediatrician and primary care physician, I firmly believe that access to affordable healthcare is a human right. Unfortunately, under the current system in CT, undocumented immigrants are not afforded this right. Barriers to healthcare access can have long-lasting implications for children, including an effect on their school performance, development and adult health. As a state, I believe we have the responsibility to level the playing field for undocumented children and provide them with the best opportunity to thrive. In addition to the moral argument, which I personally find most compelling, there are several other reasons that our state legislators should consider an expansion to the HUSKY program for undocumented immigrants. By providing children with access to preventative health services during childhood and adolescence, children are more likely to grow up to be healthy adults, which in turn may decrease rates of chronic illnesses that can be seen in adulthood such as diabetes and hypertension.

As the Executive Director at HAVEN Free Clinic, I have seen how lack of access to insurance affects the health and wellbeing of immigrant families. Last year our organization performed a needs assessment with parents from our clinic, which elucidated some of the gaps that exist within our healthcare system for immigrant children. During this assessment, it was shared that many of our patients are put in the difficult position of having to choose between providing food and a roof over their children's heads versus providing preventative healthcare services. This is not a decision that any parent should have to make. In addition to barriers to important preventative care such as vaccines and developmental screenings, parents also mentioned barriers to specialty care such as dental and mental health services for their children. Given the current mental health crisis amongst children following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever, it is essential that all children have access to early and accessible mental health interventions.

It is important to note that many other states have already taken action to improve the health of their undocumented communities. In Massachusetts, my home state, they have created a Medicaid-like program for the ages of 0-19 as well as prenatal coverage. In addition, they have created a Health Safety Net program which includes free outpatient and preventative care, as well as a limited Medicaid-like coverage to cover things like emergency and inpatient care for patients of all ages. It is important that Connecticut follow the lead of these states and use creative solutions to improve access for one of our state's most marginalized populations.

I support S.B. 284 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all community members in CT regardless of age or status.

Thank you for your time,

Mariana Budge
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HAVEN Free Clinic, Executive Director